

# Humanities' Humanity: Construing the social in HSC Modern and Ancient History, Society and Culture, and Community and Family Studies

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**Doctor of Philosophy**

## CERTIFICATE OF ORIGINAL AUTHORSHIP

I certify that the work in this thesis has not previously been submitted for a degree nor has it been submitted as part of requirements for a degree except as fully acknowledged within the text.

I also certify that the thesis has been written by me. Any help that I have received in my research work and the preparation of the thesis itself has been acknowledged. In addition, I certify that all information sources and literature used are indicated in the thesis.

Signature of Student:

A handwritten signature in black ink, consisting of a series of loops and a long horizontal tail.

Erika Matruglio

Date: 16<sup>th</sup> June, 2014

## **Dedication and Acknowledgement**

This thesis is dedicated to two men who have been instrumental in shaping my life.

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## **Abstract**

This thesis builds knowledge of the disciplinary differences in the literacy demands of senior secondary school subjects; knowledge that contributes to the development of visible pedagogies supporting more democratic educational outcomes. The focus of the study is specifically on subjects within the general domain of the humanities, here including modern and ancient history, society and culture, and community and family studies. It attends in particular to differences across these subjects in the kinds of interpersonal meanings and the nature of their expression that are rewarded in students' high stakes writing. In other words the thesis aims to map the nature and scope of humanities' humanity, as intellectual fields of the humanities are recontextualised and reproduced in senior schooling.

The question of how students are expected to engage with subject knowledge through writing is explored from two theoretical perspectives. Linguistic analyses are carried out using tools from Systemic Functional Linguistics (SFL), a social semiotic theory of language as meaning. The findings from a detailed linguistic analysis are then re-interpreted into the theoretical framework of Legitimation Code Theory (LCT) as sociological theory of knowledge practices.

From a linguistic perspective, an analysis of genre as the most abstract realisation of disciplinarity provides a basis for the subsequent investigation of discourse semantic choices and patterns of interpersonal meaning. Analysis reveals different preferences in the genres instantiated in each subject and a corresponding variation in the potential for students to engage with more uncommon-sense meanings. Genres in ancient history were found to be variable, texts in modern history favoured argument, consequential explanations were instantiated in society and culture and community and family studies privileged both factorial and consequential explanations.

Appraisal was used to analyse the interpersonal orientations of text. Patterns of attitude were found to vary across subjects, with Ancient History favouring appreciation of artefacts and evidence, Modern History orienting to judgement as

ethical evaluations, Society and Culture to judgements of capacity, and Community and Family Studies favouring expressions of affect, especially related to in/security. While most of the system of attitude is implicated across the humanities, the distribution of kinds of attitude varies across subject, and indicates more or less personal or institutionalised approaches to feelings.

Patterns and preferences in managing multiple voices in texts were also investigated using the engagement system. While all subjects were discovered to be highly heteroglossic in nature, differences in the prosodies of engagement were established. Ancient history and community and family studies were both found to be dialogically expansive, creating space for alternate viewpoints, however they differed in how this was achieved. Preferences for resources of knowledge in ancient history reference knowledge claims to voices external to the writer, while resources of entertain are used in community and family studies to open space around knowledge claims. Similarly, both society and culture and modern history were found to be dialogically contractive but different in how contraction was construed. Writers in society and culture produced strongly contractive texts through resources of deny, while in modern history contraction was achieved through counter expectancy.

What is revealed across the subjects is an interpersonal landscape.

The results of linguistic analyses were then reinterpreted from a sociological perspective, drawing on two dimensions of LCT. The first is Specialization, which investigates relations to both knowledge and knowers as the different bases of legitimation in intellectual fields. From the perspective of Specialization, the highly rated students' literacy practices in different subject areas reveal a variation in the visibility of the basis of legitimation of knowledge claims and differing strengths in their orientations to knowers. While the humanities are generally categorised as a knower code, the subjects occupy relative spaces within this categorical space, some more strongly knower oriented than others.

A second dimension of LCT is Semantics, which can be used to analyse the ability of intellectual fields to build cumulative knowledge. The patterns of meanings enacted in highly rated texts across subjects were interpreted into Semantics to reveal differences

between subjects in the potentials for cumulative knowledge building. In particular, community and family studies was identified as a subject which constrains student knowledge building through reduced requirements to manage the mode demands of extended writing.

The contributions of this study are of particular importance as they are situated in the context of a transitional stage between junior secondary and academic study. This thesis makes visible elements of interpersonal meaning-making which were heretofore under explored in the context of senior secondary learning and which are important for the management of academic writing which must be both 'objective' and evaluative'.

